



Firefighter and EMS Professional Training Requirements

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Firefighters and emergency medical service (EMS) professionals provide emergency services in Wisconsin. Under state law, firefighting means any activity related to controlling and extinguishing an unwanted fire or a fire set for training firefighters. Firefighting also includes emergency operations and responses related to rescues, terrorism, and special hazards. Both private and municipal fire departments may provide firefighting services. Fire department training is generally overseen by either the federal Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) or the state Department of Safety and Professional Services (DSPS).¹

Emergency medical services include basic life support, emergency medical care before hospitalization, and transportation of sick, disabled, or injured individuals. Municipalities, hospitals, and private companies may provide emergency medical services. Individual EMS professionals are either certified or licensed by the state Department of Health Services (DHS).² This issue brief summarizes the training requirements for firefighters and EMS professionals under Wisconsin law.

FIREFIGHTER TRAINING REQUIREMENTS

OSHA sets the training requirements for firefighters employed by private fire departments, while state law sets the training requirements for firefighters at municipal fire departments. Individual firefighters are not licensed, but a fire department may not permit a firefighter to participate in firefighting activities until that person has completed the minimum training and education requirements. All fire departments must provide training and education for their firefighters that is commensurate with the duties and functions that a firefighter is expected to perform. A fire department must assure that training and education are conducted frequently enough to ensure that each firefighter is able to perform their assigned duties and functions satisfactorily and in a safe manner so as not to endanger other fire department members. Individual private and municipal fire departments may also impose additional training requirements as a condition of employment.³

Private Fire Department Training Requirements

A private fire department must provide training and education that meets OSHA standards. The training program quality must be similar to certain state fire training schools listed in federal law. A private fire department must provide training at least annually. A firefighter who is expected to perform interior structural firefighting must be provided with training at least quarterly. A private fire department is generally exempt from training requirements in state law.⁴

Municipal Fire Department Training Requirements

DHS must set standards to protect the health and safety of municipal firefighters that are at least equal to OSHA standards that protect private firefighters. Municipal firefighter training and education must meet the minimum requirements specified by: (a) the Wisconsin Technical College System (WTCS) Board; (b) an approved state apprenticeship program; (c) an in-house training program approved by the WTCS Board; or (d) the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) 1001. Live firefighting exercises must meet NFPA standards. Additionally, training and education must be provided by a qualified instructor. Each technical college in Wisconsin must make a free firefighter training program available to members of a municipal fire department that is located within the technical college's district. A municipal firefighter training program may not require more than 60 hours of training.⁵

Wisconsin law also addresses the content of training and education that a municipal fire department must provide. The training and education program must identify specific goals and objectives for the prevention and elimination of occupational accidents, injuries, illnesses, exposures to communicable disease, and fatalities. The fire department must assure that the program is based on the department's written standard operation guidelines. A firefighter engaged in ground operations must receive training and education on the incident management system. Any program on fire ground operations must include procedures to perform a safe exit in the event of an equipment failure or sudden change in fire conditions.⁶

In addition to initial training, a municipal fire department must, at least biannually, provide training and education to firefighters about special hazards to which they may be exposed. At least monthly, a fire department must provide training and education on established fire ground operating procedures to firefighters whose duties include interior structural firefighting.⁷

EMS PROFESSIONAL TRAINING REQUIREMENTS

Unlike firefighters, state law does not distinguish training requirements for an EMS professional in private versus municipal employment. An "EMS professional" includes both an emergency medical responder and an EMS practitioner. DHS issues the credential that an individual generally must hold to work as an EMS professional. To be eligible for a credential, an individual must, among other requirements, successfully complete applicable training as established by DHS.⁸

DHS certifies emergency medical responders and licenses EMS practitioners. DHS issues multiple levels of credentials and identifies the scope of practice that each credential type may engage in. An EMS professional must be capable of performing the actions authorized by DHS in the Wisconsin scope of practice. Additionally, an EMS professional applicant must successfully complete a cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) course at the healthcare professional level. An applicant must complete training within the 24 months immediately preceding application submission.⁹

DHS issues a certification to an emergency medical responder if the person, among other requirements, satisfactorily completes an emergency medical responder course. An emergency medical responder certification course must be approved by DHS and meet or exceed the guidelines issued by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), including training for response to acts of terrorism.¹⁰

DHS issues licenses for EMS practitioners at the following levels of progression: emergency medical technician (EMT), EMT-intermediate, advanced EMT, and paramedic. DHS requires an EMS practitioner curriculum to be based on competencies in order to be capable of performing all actions in each level's scope of practice. Although DHS does not require a specific number of training hours, it estimates that the curriculum can be adequately delivered in 180 hours or fewer.¹¹

An EMS professional must renew their certification or license every three years. To be eligible for certificate renewal, an emergency medical responder must satisfactorily complete a 16-hour emergency medical responder refresher course that meets NHTSA guidelines. EMS practitioners must receive a 40- to 60-hour refresher training as appropriate for their license level of progression, or have a current NREMT registration.¹²

¹ ss. SPS 330.001, 330.002, and 330.01 (12), Wis. Adm. Code; 29 C.F.R. s. 1910.156 (a) (1) and (c) (1).

² ss. 256.01 (4p) and (6) and 256.12 (2) (a), Stats.

³ ss. SPS 330.001, 330.002, 330.07 (4), (5), and (7), and 330.08 (1), Wis. Adm. Code; 29 C.F.R. s. 1910.156 (c) (1) and (2).

⁴ s. SPS 330.002, Wis. Adm. Code; 29 C.F.R. s. 1910.156 (c) (2) and (3); [Fire Department Safety and Health Standards FAQ](#).

⁵ ss. 38.04 (9), 38.12 (9), and 101.055 (3), Stats.; ss. SPS 330.07 (3) and (9) and 330.08 (1), Wis. Adm. Code.

⁶ s. SPS 330.07 (1), (2), (10), and (11), Wis. Adm. Code.

⁷ s. SPS 330.07 (6) and (8), Wis. Adm. Code.

⁸ s. 256.15 (2), Stats.; ss. DHS 110.05 (1) and 110.06 (1) (c), Wis. Adm. Code.

⁹ ss. DHS 110.06 (1) and (1) (c) and (e), 110.12, and 110.32, Wis. Adm. Code.

¹⁰ s. 256.15 (8) (b) 3., Stats.

¹¹ ss. 256.01 (5) and 256.15 (6) (a) 1., Stats.; s. DHS 110.12, Wis. Adm. Code; [2023 Wisconsin EMT Scope of Practice](#); [EMS Training Curricula](#).

¹² ss. 256.15 (6) (b) 2., (8) (c), (8) (cm), and (10), Stats.; s. DHS 110.07 (1) (c), Wis. Adm. Code.